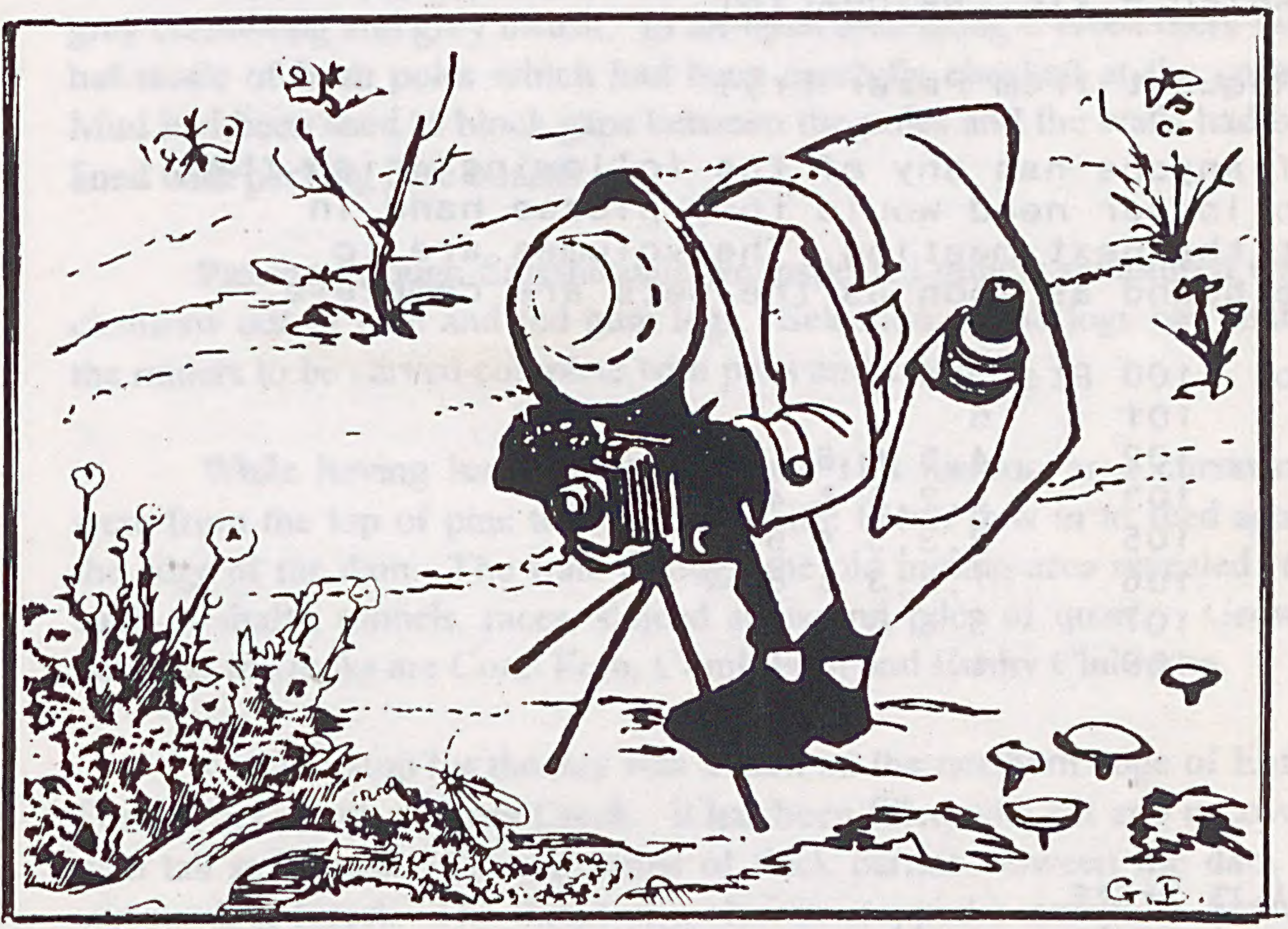
Field Naturalists Club of Ballarat Incorporated

JULY 1993

EXCURSION-NEWS SHEET

Meeting	July 2	Photographing Nature - Mr A Henderson
Meeting	Aug. 6	Members Special Interests Night
Excursion	July 4	Mounts Buninyong and Warrenheip - Mr K Hammond
Excursion	Aug. 8	Local Fungi - Florence Chuk and Shirley Faull



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Meetings as specified are held at the School of Mines and Industries, Lydiard Street Sth, Art Building, commencing at 7.30 p.m. EXCURSIONS, AS SPECIFIED, COMMENCE FROM BOOK CITY, cnr STURT AND ARMSTRONG STS, BALLARAT at 9.30 a.m. for FULL DAY OUTINGS OR at 1.30 p.m. for HALF DAY.

Field Reports: June Meeting

Lyndsay Fink: Ironbarks in Brisbane ranges are beginning to flower. The white, pink and cream flowers are attracting a wide range of honeyeaters.

Pat Murphy: Grey Butcherbird becoming more common; now seen and heard daily in garden and on TV aerial in Ballarat.

Frank Harrap: At Mt Helen: One juvenile Grey Butcherbird. Two male Magpie Larks competing for territory; one bird attacking reflection in window. Two young koalas moved through garden.

Margaret Tonkin: Flock of Galahs feeding on ground in Mt Helen.

John Gregurke: Male Darter has joined immature Darter at Lake Wendouree.

WANTED - VIC. NATURALIST

(Request from Peter Fry)

If anyone has any of the following which they no longer need would they please hand in at the next meeting. The volumes are to be bound as soon as the sets are complete.

Vol.	100	Pts	2 & 3
	101		6
	102		4,5 & 6
	103		1,2,3 & 4
	105		2,3,5 & 6
	106		1,2,3 & 6
	107		5 & 6
	109		1

Diary Dates

Thursday 29th July, 7.30pm: Committee meeting at Greg Binn's house - 12 Pleasant St Sth. Ballarat

13 to 15th August - VFNC campout at Barmah.

Smythesdale Excursion Sunday 6th June, 1993

Our excursion leader. Greg Binns. lead us to three sites close to Smythesdale. In the morning we visited the Hillcrest area situated north-west of Smythesdale. The open forest of messmate and peppermint has a sparse understorey. Large patches are covered with small grass-trees. The trunks of many trees were surfaced with a bright, rust coloured lichen. Patches of bare soil supported several types of lichen which were soft due to the rain. A spider web containing an orb-weaving spider was suspended between two trees. At first the spider appeared dead but later moved one leg, the low temperature had slowed its metabolism. Early in winter few plants were flowering but it was delightful to see the colour of common heath, correa and a few yellow balls on hedge wattle. Birds in the area included white-winged chough, white-throated treecreeper, brown thornbill. grey currawong and grey thrush. In an open area along a creek there was a hut made of bush poles which had been carefully checked at the corners. Mud had been used to block gaps between the poles and the walls had been lined with packing case boards.

Passing through Smythesdale we inspected miners sculptured with a chainsaw out of pine and red gum logs. Selection of the logs has enabled the miners to be carved complete with pans and cradles.

While having lunch at the Surface Hill historic area currawongs were from the top of pine trees and a pacific heron flew in to feed around the edge of the dam. The walk through the old mining area revealed relics such as shafts. tunnels. races, sluiced areas and piles of quartz. Growing amongst the rocks are Coral Fern. Comb Fern and Bushy Clubmoss.

Our last stop for the day was a dam on the northern edge of Enfield Forest Park, south of Ross Creek. It has been filled with silt and is covered with tall spike rush. Teatree forms of thick barrier between the dam and surrounding forest. The threat of a shower stopped a complete circuit of the dam. JG.

Natural History of Bats - Lindy Lumsden

Lindy spoke at our June 4 meeting. She showed several slides (and her own bat companion) during her excellent presentation.

Bats thrive in tropical climates so they are far more common in Queensland than Victoria. There are 2 very different kinds of bats - (1) the fruit eating bats (such as the flying foxes) and (2) the insect eating bats. We are fairly familiar with the Grey headed flying foxes which are now regular visitors to the Botanical Gardens in Melbourne. These bats range from mid Queensland as far south as Bass Strait. The Little red flying foxes are the most nomadic of the flying foxes and are also found in Victoria.
The range of bats in Queensland have led to theories and studies of various adaptations - the Tube nose bat is effectively camouflaged in it's daytime roosts, wrapping itself in wings that are dappled with green and gold, it's large protruding nose appears particularly functional for soft fruit eating. Like many other nocturnal animals the flying foxes have large well developed eyes. The Blossum bats feed exclusively on nectar and pollen. They have long pointed muzzles and long bristling tongues so they also serve as important pollinators.

There are over 80 species of insectivorous bats. Until about 15 years ago little was known about them as they were hard to catch (except for the cave dwellers such as the Bent wing bat). Nursery caves of Bent wing bats are scattered in forests and woodlands from the Kimberley across to Cape York and south to the Victorian shores of Bass Strait. Traditional nursery sites are used every summer by females flying in from hundreds of kilometres around. Suitable caves are scarce because they need to be shaped to retain the air heated by the crowd. Baby bats are fully furred and weaned after a month or so - the mothers return to their habitual hunting grounds (such as the caves some of us visited at Pomborneit). The juveniles go their own way.

Most of the insectivores use sound rather than sight to navigate at night. This sonar system - echolocation - enables them to avoid obstacles and locate food. High pitched sounds are issued at a rate of up to 200 a second - those that strike flying insects or other targets bounce back and are analysed. A bat can locate an insect, chase and eat it in half a second.

Ghost bats have big eyes and seem to see well. They navigate by echolocation but do not rely on it continuously in flight as other cave bats do. Large leaf-like protuberances of skin above the nostrils and in the ears direct the transmission and reception of calls. The Ghost bat is carniverous, eating frogs, mice, lizards, birds and big insects.
Strange "nose-leaf" formations are present in Horseshoe bats to facilitate sound direction.

Nearly all bats roost during the day in dark quiet places such as caves, tree hollows, buildings, clothing in sheds, under rocks and some even under the bark of trees.
Bats have problems with high energy loss in flight and rapid loss of heat through a large surface area. They overcome this by an ability to lower their temperatuer and metabolism while resting (torpor) and hibernating where winters are cold.

Bats have proven useful, particularly to farmers as predators of harmful insects, and as pollinators. Many species have adapted to rural and urban areas in spite of expansive clearing in agricultural areas.

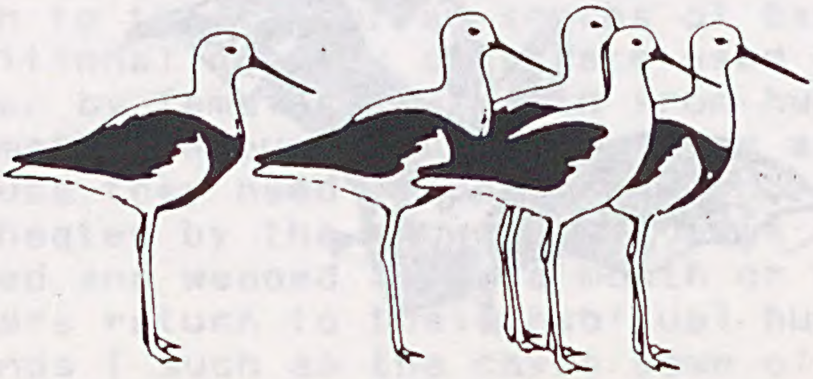
AED

Apollo Bay Excursion **Saturday, 19th June, 1993**

Members travelled in two cars to Apollo Bay for an additional excursion in June. After driving through cloud on the top of the Otways the sun was shining along the coast. We spent the morning on the spit between the Barham River and the ocean. This area is visited by a variety of birds and dotterels nest on the sand in spring. The strong northerly wind made walking difficult and was blowing drifting sand. The most interesting bird seen was the Double-barred Dotterel, several males were in breeding plumage. Other birds along the river and beach were red-capped dotterel, silver gull, pacific gull, white egret and swan. On a rock platform, a long distance out to sea, dark shapes like seals were seen. This was confirmed later in the week when Margaret Rotheram saw a seal much closer to the beach.

While having lunch with Margaret we observed eastern spinebill and New Holland honeyeaters feeding in a grevillea, magpies and blue wrens further out in the garden and crimson rosellas and galahs flying overhead.

By the time we travelled to Maits Rest in Otway National Park the a cold front and rain had arrived. This did not deter us from following the nature trail; what better time to see a cool temperate rainforest? The track has a board walk to keep people of the delicate fern gully. Ferns and mosses of many types make up a luxuriant undergrowth beneath the Myrtle Beech. Towering mountain ash and manna gum grow further away from the gullies. Thanks to Margaret for her hospitalty and leadership on the excursion. JG.



THE YEAR OF LIVING DANGEROUSLY

A recent article in Park Watch (VNPA) by Barry Traill is concerned with the conservation of the tuan (brush tailed phascogale). Remember our talk by Russell Trainor - on the arboreal fauna of the Maryborough district?
Following is a summary of his article.

Right now, in the bush blocks of central and northern Victoria male tuans will be enjoying their brief and torrid breeding season. By spring all male tuans will be dead - only pregnant females remain. The tuans and the antechinus are the only mammals to have one breeding season for their males. Their deaths are a direct result of their efforts to breed. Over the last few months male tuans have produced a massive rush of male sex hormones - this succeeds into making them into pumped-up sexual athletes. However the masive dose of hormones destroys the animal's immune system and causes direct side effects such as major internal ulcers. The male tuan rapidly weakens and dies.

The deaths of all males every season means that each year a population must successfully produce some male replacements. However if the young males are taken by drought or predators then that particular population is immediately doomed to extinction. Tuans have lost much of their range in Victoria and are now centred in the box and ironbark country of central and northern Victoria - more than 85% of this has been cleared and the gaps between the blocks are increasing. Tuans are an example of why large blocks of natural habitat are so important. Big areas offer the chance to support larger populations which are much less susceptible to localised extinction.

The article expands on this need for a system of large conservation reserves for vulnerable wildlife.

Australian Native Mammals.

Common Ringtailed Possum - Pseudocheirus - peregrinus.

This is a colourful and common possum familiar to most Australians. It occupies a variety of vegetation types where shrubs form dense tangled foliage. They make spherecalnests of bark, rags or leaves, either in hollow or in dense trees, undergrowth or mistletoe. These possums have a prehensile tail with a long pad which is used as a fifth limb while foraging for food, and also carrying nesting material.

Although it is a specialised leaf eater, the common ring tail also eats flowers, particularly those of eucalypts, and fruit, but nowhere extends to insects. It has adapted it's behaviour to live in suburbia with people, it is a sociable animal but does not form large groups, nor does it worry about overlapping territories, although not noisy it does make a hifg pitched twittering noise.

The female has 4 teats but the usual is 2 off-springs, the young leave the pouch at 4 months and are weaned at 6 months, these may be left in the nest or carried on their mother's back, they are abundant in their range, and quite common in their whole area, around Ballarat they are quite plentiful

There are 5 subspecies

"One wonders at the latin peregrinus a wanderer from foreign parts."

These notes are from the Australian Museum's Complete Book of Australian Mammals.

Elfin